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ABSTRACT

A program for potential dropouts was designed around Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development and the Kohlberg Dilemmas were used to get baseline and measure growth. The classroom setting and procedures took cognizance of the student's level of moral development and regular group counseling sessions attempted to facilitate growth. First year results showed academic improvement, attendance and behavioral gains. (Author)

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The Kohlberg Moral Development Rationale and a Program for Potential School Dropouts

An Interim Report

For years, I have been concerned because most vocational programs did not begin until the 10th or 11th grade. In the meantime, many of the students that would have profited, dropped out before they were eligible.

When I learned that our district of about 12,000 was initiating an Occupational Work Adjustment Program in one of our three junior highs, I was very pleased. That was in the fall of 1971.

In the spring of 1972, the Principal of the junior high and the teacher of the O.W.A. class asked if our department would help with the program. They felt there had been some successes but were concerned because a number of the students continued to be either apathetic or aggressive in their attitudes toward other students, the school, the community and even their jobs.

As we brain-stormed the situation, I felt perhaps the Kohlberg Moral Dilemmas could give us some insights. Perhaps, if these indeed were invariant stages, our potential dropouts were being faced with a stage expectation they could not logically relate to. If this was so, perhaps we could do something to help accelerate their moral development toward a stage that would find the secondary school setting more palatable.

This fall, 1972, we began by administering the Kohlberg Dilemma to the 21 O.W.A. students in one junior high. These 14 boys and 7 girls were selected from teacher referrals by the administrators, the guidance counsellors and the O.W.A. teacher. The Ohio State Criteria for O.W.A. Placement was used.

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It specifies that the youth are dropout-prone, underachieving and disinterested in school. From those referred, the ones most apt to profit were chosen. Student and parent conferences were held. The work-study nature of the program was explained and they were told that the teacher and counsellors felt the student would profit from and like the experience.

In addition to the Kohlberg Dilemmas, the students received the regular junior high tests which are the Differential Aptitude Test, the Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Test and the IOWA Test of Basic Skills. To this battery was added Cottel's School Interest Inventory, the Wide Range Achievement Test, the Hand Test and the Semantic Differential Self-Concept Inventory which was filled out by each student and by one of his present teachers.

Test results showed considerable disparity both among students and among the scores of any given student. For instance, the Verbal Reasoning section of the Differential Aptitude Test had a range from 3% to 55%. The mathematics section of the Wide Range Achievement Test had a mean grade equivalent of 5.9, but the range was .5 to 13.5. The student with the 13.5 scored at 3% in Verbal Reasoning. On the Hand Test, 36% had some maladjustment score, but 91% had two or more withdrawing responses. The School Interest Inventory had a mean of 43 and a range from 28-51.

Of particular interest to this Workshop, however, are the Kohlberg Dilemmas. No student selected had reached the Stage 4 level where most junior high programs operate. I feel two misleading assumptions are often made.

1. That junior high students will have moved from Piaget's concrete operations into formal operations and will be able to comprehend material presented abstractly. This assumption leaves many students believing they are the only one that doesn't understand. It leaves teachers feeling a junior high student "should" be able to understand.

2. That junior high students will have moved from the instrumental Stage 2 orientation and will be at least at the approval seeking Stage 3 or hopefully at Stage 4. If they were at Stage 4, they would have a genuine respect for authority and certain group rules would make sense in terms of the rights of others and themselves as part of a larger society.

In our sample, however, all protocols were at Stage 2. There were some that could be scored Stage 2 with a (3) in parenthesis noting a movement in that direction. There were also many incidences of Stage 1, thinking remaining.

If then, we chose to believe that the stages of Piaget and Kohlberg were invariant, students were not going to jump over the next stage to meet our expectation of where they "should" be. The question became one of what we could do to facilitate growth.

We viewed the class as a Stage 2 group and designed a program that would expose them to the next stage, Stage 3. From that vantage point, we could later consider Stage 4, since Dr. Kohlberg conceives of Stages 3 and 4, as the conventional stages of our society. Stages 5 and 6 were at best futuristic for our group.

The classroom was made up of small rooms. There is a teacher's office, a study room with corrals and a lounge type room to encourage informal interaction. Since Stage 3 usually develops in relation to the family, the informal room had a living room atmosphere and the teacher related to the students as a father-brother, teacher-counsellor. Students worked both in and out of the O.W.A. rooms, but the O.W.A. teacher often redefined regular class work in more concrete terms.

In considering moral development, we began with Dr. Kohlberg's theory that people move from one stage to the next because they become discontent with their present thinking.

In an effort to resolve this disequilibrium, they progress to successively more mature ways of thinking. It appeared that one thing we could do was to expose the students to other levels of thinking and particularly to thinking just above the student's present stage.

An intern psychologist was assigned to the O.W.A. class to help with evaluation, consult with the teacher and provide weekly group counselling. For this purpose, the group was divided into two smaller groups.

The initial approach was through hypothetical dilemmas but rapidly moved to real ones generated by the group. Since the group had a range of thinking, from Stage 1 to Stage 4, on some issues, exposure to a variety of levels was a possibility within the group. This set the stage for both planned disequilibrium and social modeling. The teacher and psychologist also asked leading questions and expressed opinions when appropriate.

Although the Kohlberg theory was our rationale, we used bits and parts of many approaches in our intervention. Of enough magnitude to mention would be certain aspects of Gestalt therapy, Transactional Analysis and Value Clarification. Ideas from these were either used to provoke thought or as a way of dealing with issues that arose from the group. Such techniques would include role playing, staying with the "here and now," verbal mediation and rank ordering.

The seven levels of valuing espoused by Louis Roth, Sidney Simon and their colleagues proved very helpful. They are concerned with the process of valuing rather than the content. Any belief or area of confusion can be examined. They suggest strategies aimed at finding out not only what you believe but how intensely you believe. For instance:

1. Is the belief or behavior prized and cherished?
2. Is it publically affirmed when appropriate?
3. Was it chosen from alternatives?

4. Was it chosen after consideration of consequences?

5. Was it chosen freely?

6. Do you act on your belief?

7. Do you consistently act on your belief?

The group sessions served many purposes. They were opportunities to understand one's self, to understand others, to improve communication skills, to learn, to listen and to be heard.

The group began, however, as part of the class expectation. This involuntary placement was a concern to teacher and psychologist so on January 4, the students were given the option of participating or not. All but two chose to continue.

At a subjective level, there seems to have been much change: From little interaction to much involvement. From separateness to a sense of loyalty toward certain others, particularly in the group. From a sense of mistrust to a beginning of trust. From surface comments to in-depth expressions of inner feelings. It appears they are closer to Stage 3 than at the beginning of the year. We will be retesting at the end of April. One bit of objective evidence we have now is that last year this group had 186 days of absence the first semester and this year they had 164. That, however, is not as significant as the fact that last year they had 40 suspensions the first semester and this year they had only 4.

PY/ro

MENTOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS June 1973

Evaluation of Shore O.W.A. Class
With Intensive Group Counseling Program

Introduction:

At the request of the Principal of Shore Jr. High, Mr. Rex Morgan, an Intern Psychologist was assigned to work extensively on a weekly basis with the O.W.A. Class. The course was entering its second year and it was felt that psychological services would further enhance the value of the program.

Aim:

Phil Isaac, the O.W.A. Coordinator, and Gary Silbiger, an Intern Psychologist, formulated five major goals. They included:

1. Better attendance
2. Better understanding of others
3. Improved communicative skills
4. Improved listening skills
5. Development of sensitivity

Method:

The primary method used for attaining these goals was the initiation of weekly group counseling sessions. After each session, the individual progress of each participant was summarized either verbally or in written form.

The evaluative tools used to measure the program's progress included the following instruments, utilized on a pre-test - post-test basis:

Kohlberg Moral Dilemmas
Semantic Differential Personality Inventory
Hand Test
Wide Range Achievement Test
School Interest Inventory
Attendance
Suspensions

Results:

The testing indicated an overall improvement by the students. A specific breakdown is detailed below. Data sheets have been attached.

On the Kohlberg Moral Dilemma, a substantial trend showed that the students were in the process of emerging from Stage I in which the physical consequences of an act determine its goodness or badness, into Stage II, wherein the student satisfies his own needs as well as the needs of others. Some students showed signs of approaching Stage III, in which good behavior is defined as that which pleases others. It is proposed that by dealing with students on these two higher levels during the counseling that, according to Kohlberg's theory, these changes were precipitated. It should be noted that the average adult level in our society is within the III-IV range.

A slight upward trend in self-concept was indicated by the Semantic Differential Self-Rating Inventory. Thus, the students were able to view themselves in a more favorable light. More significant, however, was the fact that several of the students who had viewed themselves unrealistically were able to see themselves in a far more realistic manner.

The Hand Test indicated several favorable factors. At the .01 level of significance, there was a decrease in bizarre responses. The probability of acting out decreased substantially. An increase was noted in the students responses involving interaction with their environment and with other people. Thus, a more acceptable frame of reference was developed.

Academic improvement was clearly indicated on the Wide Range Achievement Test. The mean increase in Spelling amounted to more than two and a half grade levels (from 3.87 to 6.47) while the Arithmetic level was raised almost one grade level (from 5.47 to 6.27).

The School Interest Inventory, a device primarily aimed toward the screening of school dropouts, indicated a slight lowering of scores. Thus, the trend toward dropping out at this critical age level was arrested and aimed, although slightly, in a favorable direction.

Attendance figures further indicate the success of the program. During the 1971-72 school year, previous to their involvement with O.W.A., the students averaged 24.2 days of absence. During their participation in the program, this figure was reduced to an average of 13.6 days, a reduction of 10.6 days per student.

Total suspensions for the group dropped from in excess of forty for the previous school year, down to twelve for the present school year.

Conclusion:

It is concluded that a combination of factors are responsible for the aforementioned data. The mechanics of the O.W.A. program itself, the implementation of the intensified group counseling program and the natural maturation of the involved students, all constitute contributing factors. The end result, however, is the key -- the students did evidence growth. Thus, it is suggested that further development of this vocational program occurs, supplemented by extensive counseling.

Recommendations:

It is recommended, depending upon the time available by Psychological Services, that the Intensive Counseling Program for O.W.A. classes at Shore Jr. High be continued during the 1973-74 school year. Much of the progress exhibited by the students could be enhanced by this further implementation.

In relation to specific instrumentation, the Kohlberg appeared to be a valuable tool. However, because of time involved in scoring, an abbreviated version should be used. The possibility of replacing the Semantic Differential with a more reliable self-assessment tool, possibly an adjective check list should be considered.

O.W.A. Evaluation

As an overall personality test, the efficiency of the Hand Test makes it a worthwhile instrument. The Wide Range Achievement Test also offers an efficient means of achievement evaluation. Other instruments may be added to the battery. A tally of attendance and suspension serves as a supplement to the above devices. Pre-test - Post-test implementaion should be administered.

Another possibility, again depending upon staff availability, includes Psychological Services becoming involved in a consultant's role with the other O.W.A. and O.W.E. Programs in setting up counseling groups along with screening and testing programs.

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